

**Report title: Kirklees Armed Forces Covenant Progress Update**

<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee</b>
<b>Date</b>	<b>9 May 2025</b>
<b>Cabinet Member</b> (if applicable)	<b>Cllr Beverley Addy</b>
<b>Key Decision Eligible for Call In</b>	<b>No No – no decision required</b>
<b>Purpose of Report</b>	
The provide an update to Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee (OSMC) on the Armed Forces Covenant and work of the Kirklees Armed Forces Covenant Board (KAFCB).	
<b>Recommendations</b>	
That Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee: -	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Note the contents of the report and progress made by the KAFCB to date.</li> <li>• Note the updates on the issues raised when the Armed Forces Covenant was last discussed by OSMC.</li> <li>• Discuss how OSMC Members can support priorities for the next 12 months.</li> </ul>	
<b>Reasons for Recommendations</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• OSMC feedback will be shared with the KAFCB and recommendations will be incorporated into the 2025-26 action plan.</li> </ul>	
<b>Resource Implication:</b>	
A small budget of £4,200 is available to help deliver action plan priorities. The Council will fulfil its commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant by drawing on support from relevant services, training and awareness campaigns.	
<b>Date signed off by <u>Executive Director</u> &amp; name</b>	<b>Rachel Spencer-Henshall - 25/04/2025</b>
<b>Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Finance?</b>	<b>Kevin Mulvaney - 24/05/2025</b>
<b>Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Legal Governance and Commissioning (Monitoring Officer)?</b>	<b>Samantha Lawton - 25/04/2025</b>

**Electoral wards affected:** N/A

**Ward councillors consulted:** N/A

**Public or private:** Public

**Has GDPR been considered?** Yes – No personal data

## 1. Executive Summary

1.1 The Armed Forces Covenant (Covenant) is a promise to ensure that the Armed Forces Community is treated fairly and does not face disadvantages when accessing public and commercial services. Many organisations voluntarily implement the Armed Forces Covenant as a public pledge of support to the Armed Forces.

1.2 The Armed Forces Covenant Principles are:

1.2.1 Unique Obligations: Recognise the unique obligations and sacrifices made by members of the armed forces and their families.

1.2.2 No disadvantage: Ensuring that the armed forces community is not disadvantaged compared to other citizens in accessing public and commercial services.

1.2.3 Special consideration: In some cases, special consideration is appropriate, especially for those who have given the most, such as the injured or bereaved.

1.3 The Covenant was established in its current form in 2011 and since then over 12,800 different organisations nationally have chosen to sign a pledge to honour the Covenant and support their Armed Forces Community, including 846 organisations in Yorkshire and Humber. Across the West Yorkshire region 306 organisations have pledged support as follows: -

Local Authority Area	No of Organisations that have signed the Armed Forces Covenant
Leeds	138
Bradford	50
Kirklees	47
Wakefield	44
Calderdale	27

1.4 The Armed Forces Act 2021 is a crucial piece of legislation that renews the Armed Forces Act 2006 and places a legal duty (the Armed Forces Covenant Legal Duty) on specified public persons and bodies to help prevent service personnel and veterans being disadvantaged when accessing public services.

1.5 The Armed Forces Covenant Legal Duty (Duty) requires certain public bodies to 'have due regard' to the principles of the Covenant and requires decisions about the development and delivery of certain services to be made with conscious consideration of the needs of the Armed Forces community.

1.6 The new legal obligation impacts organisations that are responsible for delivering principally statutory functions in healthcare, education, and housing services. The Armed Forces community will be affected as beneficiaries of the new Duty.

1.7 The functions in scope are: -

1.7.1 Healthcare: Provision of medical services, mental health support, and rehabilitation.

1.7.2 Education: Admission policies, support for children of service personnel, and educational attainment.

1.7.3 Housing: Allocation of social housing, homelessness prevention, and housing adaptations.

1.8 The Duty does not mandate advantageous treatment of the Armed Forces community. It only requires that due consideration of the Armed Forces Covenant principles takes place when exercising relevant functions around healthcare, education, and housing.

1.9 Kirklees Council first signed the Covenant (previously known as the Community Covenant) in June 2012 and reaffirmed its support in July 2017, alongside all political groups and partners including the military, military charities, West Yorkshire Police, and Third Sector Leaders.

1.10 Our commitment to ensuring fair treatment and support for the armed forces community involves collaboration between the government, businesses, local authorities, charities, and the public. To this end the KAFCB was established in 2013 to encourage services and partners to support the local armed forces community, making it easier for Service personnel, families, and Veterans to access available help and support from the Ministry of Defence (MOD), statutory providers, and the charitable and voluntary sectors.

1.11 This report provides an overview of the KAFCB's work and progress to date in delivering our commitment to the principles of the Covenant.

## 2. Information required to take a decision

2.1 The Duty applies to the following members of the Armed Forces Community, collectively defined in the Act as 'Service people':

2.1.1 members of the regular forces and the reserve forces.

2.1.2 members of British overseas territory forces who are subject to Service law.

2.1.3 former members of any of His Majesty's forces who are ordinarily resident in the UK.

2.1.4 relevant family members of those in (2.1.1) to (2.1.4) above

2.1.5 For information purposes the proportion of UK Armed Forces Veterans in Kirklees and neighbouring local authorities based on 2021 Office for National Statistics published Census data detailing the Veteran population in England and Wales is set out in the table below:

Local Authority Area	Previously served in regular UK armed forces.		Previously served in reserve UK armed forces.		Previously served in both regular and reserve UK armed forces.		Has previously served in any UK armed forces.		Has not previously served in any UK armed forces.	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Leeds	14,811	2.2	4,730	0.7	860	0.1	20,401	3.1	638,070	96.9
Bradford	9,412	2.2	2,461	0.6	518	0.1	12,391	2.9	409,184	97.1
Wakefield	9,067	3.2	2,144	0.7	512	0.2	11,723	4.1	275,815	95.9
<b>Kirklees</b>	<b>8,942</b>	<b>2.6</b>	<b>2,371</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>478</b>	<b>0.1</b>	<b>11,791</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>334,484</b>	<b>96.6</b>
Calderdale	5,082	3.0	1,214	0.7	261	0.2	6,557	3.9	160,077	96.1

2.2 What does the Duty do?

2.2.1 The Duty should **raise awareness amongst organisations that provide services in healthcare, education, and housing of how Service life can impact on the Armed Forces community**, and how disadvantages can arise due to Service when members of that community seek to access key local services.

2.2.2 The Duty requires **organisations delivering local services to have due regard to the Covenant principles** when exercising functions in the areas of housing, healthcare, and education.

2.2.3 “Due regard” means that organisations in scope of the Duty will need to **consciously consider the unique obligations and sacrifices made by the Armed Forces**; that it is desirable to remove disadvantages faced by the Armed Forces community; and that special provision may be justified in some circumstances.

2.3 This report provides an overview of the KAFCB's work, progress to date in delivering our commitment to the Covenant Duty and future priorities, set out at Appendix 1.

### 3. **Implications for the Council**

#### 3.1 **Council Plan**

Supporting the Armed Forces Covenant aligns with the priorities in the Kirklees Council Plan 2025 in several ways:

**Inclusive Communities:** The Covenant promotes mutual support between the civilian community and the Armed Forces community, fostering a sense of belonging and inclusion.

**Health and Wellbeing:** The Covenant supports the health and wellbeing of the Armed Forces community by ensuring that armed forces personnel and their families have access to necessary services without disadvantage.

**Economic Resilience:** The Covenant encourages local businesses to support veterans and their families, which can enhance economic opportunities and stability within the Armed Forces community.

**Housing and Employment:** The Covenant includes provisions for helping veterans with housing and employment, which aligns with the council's goals of providing secure housing and job opportunities for all residents.

By integrating these principles, the Kirklees Council Plan 2025 aims to create a supportive and inclusive environment for all its residents, including those who have served in the Armed Forces.

#### 3.2 **Financial Implications**

Our commitment and duty to the Armed Forces Covenant will be taken forward within existing budgets and draw upon capacity and involvement from services that support the Kirklees Armed Forces Covenant Board, training programmes available via My Learning and awareness raising campaigns.

In addition, a small budget of £4,200 is available to help deliver action plan priorities.

#### 3.3 **Legal Implications**

The Armed Forces Act 2021 enshrined the Covenant into law, requiring Councils to have ‘due regard’ to the principles of the Covenant when exercising certain functions related to housing, education, and healthcare. The Council must ensure that service personnel, veterans, and their families are not disadvantaged when accessing public services compared to other citizens.

Officers supporting the KAFCB refer to the statutory guidance issued by the Ministry of Defence, which provides detailed instructions on how to comply with the Covenant Duty.

The statutory guidance describes the Armed Forces Covenant Duty legal obligation as follows:

*When a specified body exercises a relevant function, it must have due regard to:*

- a. the unique obligations of, and sacrifices made by, the armed forces;*
- b. the principle that it is desirable to remove disadvantages arising for Service people from membership, or former membership, of the armed forces; and,*
- c. the principle that special provision for Service people may be justified by the effects on such people of membership, or former membership, of the armed forces.*

The KAFCB reports to OSMC and Council to provide progress on the processes, actions and work undertaken to demonstrate how the Council complies with the Covenant Duty.

#### 3.4 **Climate Change and Air Quality**

No implications

#### 3.5 **Other (e.g. Risk, Integrated Impact Assessment or Human Resources)**

- The work of the Kirklees Armed Forces Covenant Board will help the Council meet its Covenant Duty by providing a mechanism and approach to ensure that members of the Armed Forces Community are not disadvantaged in accessing public services. The work of the Board includes exploring best practices, fostering partnerships with local organisations and charities, and exploring how the Council can better tailor its services to meet the unique needs of service members, veterans, and their families. The work and approach will help to fulfil our legal obligations and demonstrate our commitment to supporting the Armed Forces Community.

- **Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)**

An IIA will be undertaken to help ensure the Armed Forces Community receives fair treatment when accessing services, particularly in healthcare, housing, and education, which fall under the scope of the Covenant Duty.

#### 4. **Consultation**

Members of the Kirklees Armed Forces Covenant Board have been asked to give feedback on progress to date and also highlight areas/actions where more focus is still required. Comments received are summarised below.

##### Royal British Legion

*I applaud your efforts to increase Veteran Friendly accreditation across GP surgeries in the local authority area, and to compile a comprehensive report on existing support provision for the local Armed Forces community.*

*To improve your Armed Forces Covenant activity at Kirklees Council, I would suggest further collaboration with neighbouring West Yorkshire local authorities through closer joint working, sharing best practice and make more efficient use of resources.*

##### Rural Veterans Hub

*I like the way the meetings are run re format etc, I think some of the speakers are really good, sometimes though I feel the content from some of the speakers isn't really relevant with just statistics but not really speaking about helping veterans.*

*I realise the Veterans Covenant is about 'fairness', but it doesn't really seem to say a lot. We have to keep on applying for funding for our charity and I believe a lot of good comes from running these hubs. When you are on the shop floor seeing veterans, you realise that lots more could be done to help.*

## Kirklees Local TV

*We could, and should, meet much more often. This would increase momentum and provide enhanced service for veterans and their families in Kirklees.*

*Consider creating sub-groups within KAFC that will focus on single issues, and in some cases, multiple issues.*

*These suggestions will increase momentum in the services provided to veterans and their families. Moreover, enhance the communication and visibility between the armed and public sector services.*

The comments above provide a snapshot, with additional feedback from Board members included in Appendix 1: Future Priorities.

### 5. **Engagement**

The work and priority actions of the Armed Forces Covenant Board have been developed in partnership with the various stakeholders comprising of relevant Council Services, partners, MOD, military charities, health partners.

### 6. **Next steps and timelines**

- Work will continue to support the work of the KAFCB and deliver the existing and future priority actions set out in Appendix 1
- Officers will continue to engage with regional events to share and exchange best practice and ensure compliance with the statutory guidance issued by the MOD.
- To network with Covenant officers across West Yorkshire and identify opportunities to work collaboratively.

### 7. **Contact officer**

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### 8. **Background Papers and History of Decisions**

A progress update on the work of the Armed Forces Covenant Board was presented to Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee in June 2023 [OSMC Minutes June 2023](#)

### 9. **Appendices**

List all appendices

### 10. **Service Director responsible**

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